DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 177 255 UD 019 813

AUTHOR Skinner, Kenneth A.; Hendricks, Glenn L.
TITLE Indochinese Refugees: An Emerging Ethnic Minority.
PUB DATE Nov 78
NOTE 33p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (77th, Los Angeles, California, November 14-18, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment); Economic Factors; Educational Opportunities; Educational Policy; Employment Opportunities; *Ethnicity; Government Role; Higher Education; Identification (Psychological); Immigrants; *Indochinese; *Institutional Role; Public Policy; *Refugees; *Social Integration; Student Financial Aid

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the extent to which educational and other institutions of the dominant society are shaping the ethnic self-identity of Indochinese refugees. It is argued that an institutionally-defined ethnic self-identity is being imposed on the Indochinese as a precondition for consideration as a minority group in United States society. Major factors in the process of ethnic self-identification among the refugees in Minnesota are described. These include the refugees' social and occupational backgrounds, the relationship of the refugees with "patrons" and "brokers," the Federal government's resettlement policies, and the administrative actions taken by the University of Minnesota, particularly in regard to student financial aid. It is pointed out that the categorization of the Indochinese as an "ethnic minority" facilitates institutional action in providing financial, occupational, and educational resources to this group. (Author/EB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED177255

AUG 3 1 1979

INDOCHINESE REFUGEES: AN EMERGING ETHNIC MINORITY

Kenneth A. Skinner

Assistant Professor of Anthropology
University of Northern Iowa

Glenn L. Hendricks

Associate Professor of Anthropology
University of Minnesota

Presented at the
77th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association
November 14-18, 1978
Los Angeles, California

U0019813

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Glenn L. Hendricks

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Fredrik Barth has suggested that the critical feature relating to ethnic identification is "the characteristic of self-ascription and ascription by others" (1969:13). That is, identification as a separate category of people is the consequence both of conscious assertion of distinctiveness and the accordance of this status by others. The development of ethnic self-identity, therefore, is a process involving both increasing self-awareness and interaction with others.

One of the social contexts in which ethnic self-identity emerges and is shaped is in the adaptation of immigrants to a new environment. Anthropologists' studies of immigrants from rural areas to towns in various parts of the world have demonstrated that a common adaptive strategy involves emphasizing rural-based ethnic roots. Voluntary associations and residential communities often develop along ethnic lines. Employment opportunities for the immigrants are made available through individuals' links within the ethnic community. The larger society may acknowledge the ethnic community and may even allot certain occupations to those within the ethnic category (Mayer 1961; Hendricks 1974; Foster 1974; Macdonald 1964).

When over 145,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos arrived in the United States in mid-1975, they began a long and often arduous process of adaptation to a new environment. Since 1975, nearly thirty thousand additional Indochinese have arrived. Their process of adaptation provides an opportunity to observe the emergence of a people's self-identification in ethnic terms. The refugees' experience during the past four years reveals how outsiders, specifically educational and other institutions of the dominant society, are shaping the definition of a people's ethnic self-identity. This is an ongoing process which is occurring in advance of

the Indochinese having defined for themselves how they wish to articulate with the dominant society. We argue in this paper that an institutionally-defined ethnic self-identity is being imposed on the Indochinese as a pre-condition for consideration as a minority group in U.S. society.[1] This conclusion is based on intensive study of the refugees' experience in Minnesota, and information from other states reveals similarities in experiences.[2] Data for the study were collected from interviews with Vietnamese and Americans involved in various aspects of the resettlement process and with refugees. University of Minnesota records and documents were also used.

Ethnic groups have been shown to be related to differential access to economic resources (cf. Despres [Ed.] 1975; Smith 1969). The history of the adaptation of Indochinese to U.S. society can be seen as a process by which the basis for access to resources is being shifted from their identification as "refugees" to their identification as an "ethnic minority." For most Indochinese, adjusting to the new environment has meant gaining access to needed financial, occupational, and educational resources. During the initial years of their presence in the United States, the ability to provide access to these resources rested with individuals and groups whom we identify as "patrons" and "brokers." As immediate needs stemming from sudden displacement have been met, the Indochinese have come into greater direct contact with the institutions of U.S. society. Accompanying this has been a decline in the involvement of intermediaries and benefactors. It is at this stage of the adaptation process that we find the emergence of an imposition of ethnic identity. As institutions seek to provide assistance to these new and distinctive clients, a categorization of the Indochinese as an "ethnic minority" is being applied in order to

facilitate institutions' actions.

This categorization is especially likely to occur in higher education, which in its efforts to meet social and legal requirements is openly institutionalizing access to resources based on ethnic minority status. Moreover, because attending a university or college can be viewed as a process by which students are socialized to some extent into the norms of the larger society, such categorization by educational institutions has a potentially great effect on how indivduals view themselves and their relationship to society. In Minnesota, over one-third of the Indochinese between 18 and 24 years of age was enrolled in universities or colleges in Fall 1977. Three-quarters of all enrollees, or 203 students, were at the University of Minnesota. Attending institutions of higher education is an adaptive strategy for a large segment of young Indochinese, and higher education's response to this segment is likely to contribute to the establishment of patterns both for other institutions' responses and for the Indochinese population's choices about how to articulate with the larger society. Should institutions of higher education encourage Indochinese to adopt a new self-identification of being Asian "ethnics" and a "minority," this could result in a shift in self-identification and a taking on of different sets of assumptions about themselves than they held prior to migration. A description of the adaptation process of the refugee community provides the basis for understanding how such a shift is occurring.

The Indochinese Community

Since 1946 an estimated 1.6 million of the nine million people who have immigrated to the U.S. have been refugees. Indochinese refugees, the vast majority of whom are Vietnamese, are the most recent large population to

arrive. Their adaptation, however, is taking place in a different social climate than that which existed for previous immigrants. According to R.A. Schemerhorn, the late 1960's was a "watershed" in how ethnic identity is viewed in the U.S. Prior to that time, the dominant ideology was assimilationism, and immigrants were tolerated "only when they were willing to give up their language and foreign customs" (1974:4). As a result of Blacks' assertion of a separate cultural identity, other peoples of European and non-European ancestry have become more aware of their ethnic identities, and thus are contributing to a social climate increasingly tolerant of ethnic diversity and supportive of people's rights to maintain cultural distinctiveness. If Schemerhorn's characterization of the present social climate is correct, we should find the adaptation of the Indochinese taking a different form than that of earlier immigrants.

The refugees' strategies of adaptation are shaped by their social backgrounds and situations in the United States. It is the interfacing of the refugees' strategies with federal government resettlement policies, the present social climate, and the well-meaning efforts of institutions and individuals to provide assistance which is resulting in the formation of a new ethnic self-identity.

The changes of governments in the Indochinese nations during the spring of 1975 were preceded and followed by thousands of people leaving their homelands. The exodus was marked by scenes of people scrambling aboard U.S. military helicopters or clamoring for berths on ships headed out to sea. During the days prior to the Saigon government's collapse, thousands of Vietnamese made preparations for their departure, either through contacts with American embassy and military personnel or by finding their own means of exit (cf. Snepp 1977; Kelly 1977). Transported to this country by the

U.S. military, they were placed in relocation camps for processing.

While the Indochinese refugees have a variety of social backgrounds, two distinct, though not all-inclusive, categories can be identified which are of interest to us. Most refugees fall in the first category as families from urban areas in which the head of the household was a "professional" of some kind. They can be considered middle and upper class, and an HEW official has provided the statistic that eighty-five percent of the refugees come from urban areas, primarily Saigon. Occupations represented in the "urban professional" category include civil servants and politicians, teachers, military and police officers, U.S. Embassy and Defense Attaché Office staff, employees of U.S. military installations, businessmen who had dealings with American firms, and physicians (cf. Pearlstine 1975; Le 1975; Liu and Murata 1977). An HEW survey in September 1976 found that two-thirds of the heads of households had been in white-collar jobs in their homelands.

The majority of the people in this "urban professional" category have their roots in North Vietnam. Following the French defeat in 1954, these individuals' families settled in urban areas of the South, finding positions in the bureaucratic, military, and business infrastructures of the new state. Having migrated in the wake of one change of government or being children of parents who had done so made these people more conscious of flight as a possible course of action. Close identification with Americans and/or the government of South Vietnam also prompted the belief among a sizable number that leaving was preferable to remaining in their homeland.

The second category is composed of young people, mostly men, who are not accompanied by any of their immediate family. Many of the men were low-ranking military personnel from families of the lower strata of Vietnamese

society, and when the defenses around Saigon were falling they scrambled for safety aboard boats and helicopters. Few thought at the time that this was an act of self-exile. University students of middle class backgrounds also became separated from their families and were caught up in the general panic to escape advancing forces. A few, however, decided weeks in advance to take advantage of an opportunity to leave Vietnam should there be one, hoping they could make a better life elsewhere. Cases have been reported of this being done at parents' urging.

Brokers and Patrons for the Refugees

Seeking to "make it" in their new environment, the refugees require access to certain financial, occupational, and educational resources of the larger society. During their initial years in this country, they have been afforded the services of individuals and institutions which can be considered "brokers" or "patrons." "Brokers" are defined as those who assist in obtaining resources to meet perceived needs but do not control the means by which such needs can be met. The "broker" may possess information about the larger society which can be of assistance or may have access to means which can be employed by individuals. A "patron," on the other hand, controls certain resources and can dispense them to individuals at his discretion and according to his designs (cf. Paine 1971; Wolf 1956). In the case of the Indochinese, both "patrons" and "brokers" have provided their assistance on the basis of clients being within the category "refugee."

By far, the major "patron" for the refugees has been the federal government. As the war was ending, the Departments of Defense, State, and HEW mobilized to assist those who had left their homelands in resettling

in the U.S. The Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 appropriated $405 million for resettlement, $203 million of which was available to HEW for reimbursement to states for cash assistance, medical assistance, and social services to refugees. These funds were also used for special English language classes and occupational re-training programs. A four-year extension of appropriations for resettlement passed Congress in October 1977 when the original Act expired.

The new legislation also made the refugees eligible for permanent resident status. Since their arrival, however, the refugees held the legal status of "parolee," a special category instituted in 1952 which circumvents quota restrictions on immigration and allows for entrance under emergency circumstances. The original intent of the "parolee" provisions of the Immigration and Naturalization Act was to give authority to the Attorney General to admit people on an individual case-by-case basis, such as a high-level communist defector or someone found floating at sea. The meaning of "parolee" was altered dramatically when it was used to admit 38,000 Hungarian refugees and 675,000 Cuban refugees. As "parolees" the Indochinese did not have rights of their own, but were legally dependent on legislative actions.

Soon after their arrival, refugees were placed with individuals or organizations willing to assume responsibility for their adjustment. As "patrons," sponsors were expected to provide food, clothing, shelter, pocket money, and ordinary medical expenses. As "brokers," sponsors tried to act as intermediaries for their charges, helping them find employment and make contact with institutions. Most of the sponsors were church groups or service organizations, coordinated by voluntary agencies with experience in resettlement activities, such as the Lutheran Social Services and Catholic

Charities. The voluntary agencies assisted sponsors financially with federal funds made available through contracts on the basis of $500 per refugee resettled.

Applications from potential sponsors were screened while the refugees were in the relocation camps, and then families and individuals were matched with sponsors. Life in the relocation camps was not pleasant, and people were anxious to get out. Each day, rumors spread through the camps about what size families were being requested by sponsors. In some instances, people manipulated their family situations in order to be placed with a sponsor. For example, in Minneapolis there is a "family" composed of an unmarried man and woman with their respective children, as well as an "uncle" and "nephew" who share the same surname but are not actually kin.

The use of local sponsors is the result of policy decisions by resettlement planners at the federal level. From the outset, federal officials stressed that the goal of the resettlement program was to aid refugees in becoming financially self-sufficient. It was thought that short-term localized private financing by sponsors, combined with existing federal and state employment/training programs, would result in relatively rapid achievement of self-sufficiency. The experience of the Cuban refugee program suggested that Indochinese should not be allowed to concentrate in geographic areas, as $90 million in federal funds continues to be allocated annually to Dade County, Florida, for refugee assistance. The decision to disperse the refugees was also influenced by fears expressed in many quarters that refugees would compete with Americans for jobs in areas of high unemployment.

Unlike other peoples who have migrated to the U.S., such as Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Mexicans, the Indochinese had no large support

group already residing in the U.S. who could act as "patrons" and "brokers" for newly-arrived fellow nationals. Consequently, there were no occupational and social networks into which the refugees immediately could fit. Critics of the dispersal policy claim that one of the consequences of achieving the federal government's political objective of low visibility for the resettlement program is that refugee families and individuals have little choice but to accommodate themselves to an alien culture as rapidly as possible. A number of individuals and service groups recommended that the refugees be allowed the option of forming their own communities within the United States, as these would permit agricultural and business cooperatives as well as facilitate psychological adjustment (Le 1975; Chau 1975). Despite historical precedents of recognizing the value of communities settled by single ethnic or religious groups, federal officials gave little consideration to such recommendations. The factors which influenced the basic outline of resettlement policy were political and financial, not social (cf. Kelly 1977). Assessment of institutional capabilities and resources took precedence over shaping policy to minimize the refugees' predictable difficulties in psychological and economic adjustment. Following the initial policy decision to disperse the refugees, prescriptions for the refugees' adaptation fell into place. Essentially these are that the refugees should achieve financial self-sufficiency and assimilate into the larger society. The belief that these are possible and good for a people arises from assumptions about U.S. history; that is, that individual economic success comes to those who make the effort and that much of the country's strength stems from an American character forged from "melting" together many nationalities. The recently-touted value of respecting a people's cultural distinctiveness, which is

described by Schemerhorn, does not seem to have influenced basic policy decisions. The practical consequence of the policy of dispersal is that it makes adoption of behavior patterns and values of the larger society appear to be a prerequisite to financial self-sufficiency. Many studies of immigrants suggest, however, that self-sufficiency can be accomplished without assimilation of the ways of the larger society (e.g., Sherman 1961; Cohen 1969; Glazer and Moynihan 1970).

The experience of Tibetan refugees in India demonstrates that there are alternatives to encouraging assimilation as a means for attaining economic self-sufficiency. Speaking of the policy choices open to the Government of India in dealing with 80,000 Tibetans who had fled Chinese-controlled Tibet in 1959, Melvyn C. Goldstein (1975) sees the options as a continuum running between two poles of assimilation and pluralism. Choosing a policy which can be located toward the pluralistic end of this continuum, the Government of India clearly demonstrated its belief that resettlement policies should not discourage or destroy Tibetan cultural institutions and traditions. The decision was made to establish a series of permanent agricultural settlements throughout India. Three to four thousand Tibetans live in each settlement and are allowed considerable political and cultural autonomy. The initial policy decision to permit what Goldstein calls a "pluralistic adaptation" by the refugees contributed to the economic self-sufficiency of the refugees without encouraging them to take on an identity other than being Tibetan.

The dispersal of the Indochinese also hindered the emergence of refugee-organized associations which could develop programs and social networks conducive to the maintenance of traditions and psychological well-being. The literature on immigrants is replete with studies showing the importance of

associations based on shared cultural characteristics and/or religious affiliation (e.g., Little 1957; Bruner 1972; Hamer 1967). Besides the distance separating refugees' residences, other factors retarded the formation of associations. During the initial months after leaving relocation camps, the refugees in Minnesota received assistance from an extant Vietnamese-American Association. Despite its efforts to provide "brokerage" for refugees, the organization was not accepted by the refugees as representing their interests. Reportedly, the refugees could not identify with a group whose members were primarily Vietnamese women and their American husbands. Besides feeling that these resident Vietnamese could not appreciate their situation, some refugees resented the comfortable life of "bar girls," whom they looked down on, while they were having difficulty regaining the outward signs of their status in Vietnam. Equally important, however, is the fact that the Vietnamese-American Association, in contrast to sponsors and government agencies, had no financial resources which could be used to place it in the position of "patron" to the refugees.

About a year after the refugees' arrival, however, refugee-organized associations began appearing in Minnesota. At present there are three for the Vietnamese, one for Laotians, one for Hmong of Laos, and one for Cambodians. Religious affiliations have also served as the basis for refugee organizations, as evidenced by Vietnamese Buddhist, Catholic, and Evangelical associations. Because financial resources are limited and few individuals can take much time away from efforts to provide for their own livelihood to devote to activities, the associations have been primarily involved in organizing a few cultural events, such as New Years celebrations. Within the Vietnamese community, suspicions about the ambitions of association leaders as well as perceived social and ideological exclusiveness have also

restricted active participation by many people.

Adaptation by Self-Sufficiency or Dependency?

Informants provided a varied picture of the extent to which the refugees have adopted self-sufficiency as a goal, as well as differing assessments of the chances to achieve it. There are numerous examples of refugees who have found good jobs based on previous qualifications or connections cultivated with the American establishment in Indochina. Since many of the refugees who were employed in their home countries were civil servants, teachers, or in the military, their skills are not easily transferable to another society; and so they have had to be resourceful in developing new skills through re-training. In December 1977, 66.5 percent of the Indochinese over 16 years of age were in the labor force, and 94.5 percent of those were employed --- figures slightly better than the U.S. average.

The employment situation for many refugees is perceived by some "brokers/patrons" as being one of "underemployment;" that is, that they are employed in jobs below those for which they are qualified. More accurately, the statement that refugees are underemployed refers to the fact that many are in jobs of lower status and salaries than those held in Vietnam. One of the consequences of displacement from one culture to another is that qualifications and occupational status achieved within the institutional structures and value system of one's own culture are often irrelevant in another. The inference of statements that refugees are "underemployed," however, is that somehow they are being deprived of occupational positions which should be theirs. But this ignores fundamental implications of sudden movement to a radically different society and does not acknowledge the relationship of policies forcing involvement in established economic structures.

A former army general's employment as a dishwasher is more a reflection of inability to regain a previous occupational status than it is a case of underemployment. A few men have balked at entering re-training programs or accepting employment because achievable positions did not match their previous occupational statuses.

Vietnamese and Americans who have assisted the refugees indicate that signs of dependency are observable in the actions and statements of some refugees. Experiences of sponsors and the use of public assistance are cited as the basis for this concern. Because sponsors represented varying degrees of affluence, there were great differences in what was provided refugee families or individuals. Many refugees could not understand why they were receiving less assistance from sponsors than were others. As far as the refugees were concerned, they were all in the same situation as displaced persons, and so should be treated equally. Instances of refugees presenting sponsors with explicit financial demands were not uncommon. Vietnamese informants revealed that a few families having sizable amounts of money brought from Vietnam did not inform their sponsors of this in hopes of obtaining greater support. Sponsors' generosity, of course, fed assumptions about the unlimited nature of their assistance. Believing that humanitarian assistance should not appear contractual, many sponsors were reluctant to define strictly what they would provide.

While Indochinese were willing to identify themselves as "refugees" because of the assistance rendered as a consequence of occupying this status, many were confused when confronted with American notions about how a refugee should act. For example, some sponsors assumed that refugees should accept menial jobs just to keep food on the table, should postpone purchasing luxury items, and should drive used rather than new cars. Migration

from one country to another, however, has not automatically destroyed people's sense of who they are, nor has it lowered their estimation of what constitutes an acceptable lifestyle. Giving the appearance that a family has been able to translate its status in Vietnam into success in this country is important to people, as is providing a comfortable home environment for children to counteract the appeal of American culture. To do either of these requires purchases of items beyond what is necessary for subsistence. Embracing the ascribed status of "refugee" has proven useful, and often a prerequisite, in obtaining resources considered necessary for achieving both economic and social goals, but the behavioral content which "patrons/brokers" often associated with this status was not seen by Indochinese as supportive of their desire to maintain their cultural identity.

According to provisions of the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act, any public financial assistance provided to refugees by the states between April 1975 and October 1977 was to be totally reimbursed to the states by HEW. The usual eligibility requirements that must be met in order to receive public assistance (ie., disability, over 65 years of age, or dependent child of single parent or unemployed father) have been waived for the refugees. Assessment of eligibility for cash assistance is done on a case by case basis, rather than according to normal standards. Despite efforts to eliminate the necessity for refugees to beome long-term recipients of public assistance, the percentage of the national refugee population receiving cash assistance increased from 12 percent in September 1975 to 36 percent in May 1977 (Task Force for Indochina Refugees 1977). Recipients fall into three categories. First, some recipients qualify under established

criteria defining eligibility. Second, many continue having difficulty finding adequate employment. As a third category, informants identified a large number who view public assistance as an entitlement stemming from their status as refugees or their belief that the U.S. government has an obligation to allies "prematurely abandoned" and are not reluctant to accept help on this basis. After some hesitation, Congress granted a four-year extension for the reimbursement program, fully until September 1978 and then decreasing by 25 percent during each of the three subsequent years.

There is evidence to suggest that the dispersal policy has only postponed eventual geographic concentration. Many of the families which were resettled in small towns felt so isolated that they have sought the company of fellow nationals by moving to large urban areas, abandoning sponsors and jobs in the process. Families and individuals resettled in rural as well as urban areas have left jobs and sponsor-provided housing to go to states such as California and Texas, either to join relatives or friends or to escape the unaccustomed cold of winter. Minnesota's refugee population dropped from 4250 in January 1976 to approximately 3200 in the fall of 1977, and similar declines are reported for many other states. Despite warnings by the voluntary agencies that California's unemployment rate and cost of living are higher than elsewhere, the number of refugees in California increased from 30,550 in January 1976 to over 50,000 in late 1977 (Department of Health, State of California 1977). Refugees who migrate to another state are not reassigned sponsors and must seek out new employment opportunities. Not surprisingly, many become heavily dependent on public assistance.

Becoming an Ethnic Minority

The category "refugee" is a specialized classification, having its genesis in specific political and social events and applied to a discrete population. As categories go, it has some integrity, as all individuals included within it share an identifiable trait, ie., departure from their homelands because of political change. The roles identified as "patrons" and "brokers" for the Indochinese emerged in response to these events and are of limited duration.

As Indochinese achieve permanent residency and as they come into more direct contact with institutions of the society, the status of being "refugee" has less substantive meaning than it did when interacting with self-designated "patrons" and "brokers." Those institutions which employ categories in providing services to people generally do so on the basis of non-particularistic categories current in the society as a whole. For example, a variety of institutions find utility in describing people as "students," "senior citizens," and "state residents." Each of these statuses defines rights and obligations of those within the category, as well as setting forth particulars for how institutions should deal with people in each category. The Indochinese are presently experiencing a shift in how they are being classified, as institutions seek to provide services on the basis of established social categories of clients rather than on the basis of the category "refugee," which has ambiguous institutional meaning.

For the immediate future, not all institutions will abandon or supplement use of the category "refugee." The application of other categories by a few institutions, however, will encourage other institutions

to adopt similar categories. Governmental, occupational, and educational institutions eventually are likely to develop a common way of viewing the status of the Indochinese refugees which fits established patterns of interaction with clients and employees.

Because large numbers of Indochinese are concentrated in single educational institutions, it is here that much of the redefinition of status is taking place first. In an effort to assist this new segment of its student population, the University of Minnesota has made administrative decisions which have the effect of encouraging refugee students to adopt a new self-identification, that of being Asian "ethnics" and a "minority." While no single industry or business in the state has a large number of Indochinese employees, there are already indications that employers are including Indochinese in headcounts of minority applicants and employees.

Indochinese students' motivations for attending an institution of higher education are diverse, but the assumption that a university degree will ensure stable and lucrative employment is the pre-eminent reason. When Indochinese students were asked to state career goals, nearly 70 percent indicated engineering, health care, business, or computer science --- aspirations reflecting their middle or upper class backgrounds. The Vietnamese education system was highly elitist, and graduates from most programs were virtually guaranteed prestigious positions. As a consequence, Vietnamese employment counselors express concern that students are bringing to American universities unrealistic expectations about the marketability of a degree.

Since the 1975-76 academic year, the number of Indochinese students on campus has grown dramatically to its present level of over 200. In trying

to respond to their needs, University administrators were initially confronted with the ambiguity of their legal status as "parolees." Indochinese were neither non-immigrants, as are foreign students, nor permanent residents. In a series of decisions, federal and state governments interpreted "parolee" status as making the Indochinese eligible for practically all federal and state programs, including federally-supported Basic Educational Opportunity Grants and Guaranteed Student Loans. In keeping with the spirit of these decisions, the University offered the Indochinese tuition rates as state residents.

Since the Indochinese do not share the same legal status as foreign students, it was soon recognized that the International Student Adviser's Office (ISAO) should not include them among its clients. While no single office of the University has taken on administrative responsibility for the Indochinese in the way that ISAO has responsibility for foreign students, administrative and counseling activities have shifted to the Minority Students Support Program and the colleges in which Indochinese are enrolled. As part of an administrative desire to provide services to Indochinese students by utilizing existing student service structures, the University has recognized the Indochinese as minority students. Specifically, they have been included in the category "Asian-American," one of four ethnic categories of minority status. Within the category Asian-American are people whose origins are in East Asia, Southeast Asia, the Indian Subcontinent, and the Pacific Islands.

Students certified for participation in the Minority Students Support Program are provided special counseling and are eligible for financial assistance from a reserved fund. Program counselors certify a student for participation when he or she is found to meet two out of three criteria.

The first criterion is inclusion in one of the four ethnic categories; the second is economic disadvantage; and the third is educational disadvantage. The Indochinese generally qualify on the basis of all three criteria. Even if a student comes from a family which was able to bring much of their wealth with them to the U.S., he or she could qualify for the program. "Educational disadvantage" has generally been interpreted as being their English language deficiency and not the low quality of their previous education. In fact, students' achievements in the education system of Vietnam often compare favorably with those of the general population of American students.

Until recently, the number of Asian-American students certified for the program has been small. This was the result of the fact that students of Asian ancestry generally did not qualify on the basis of economic and educational disadvantage. With the arrival of the Indochinese, the number of Asian-American students certified for the Minority Students Support Program increased six-fold in two years. In Fall 1977, seventy-five percent of the Indochinese were certified for the program. The Asian-American contingent has moved from being the ethnic category with the smallest number of participants to being the second largest.

The response of people in other ethnic minority categories is worth noting. From the point of view of many individuals, the Indochinese have not experienced the racial discrimination and social neglect in U.S. society as have Blacks, American Indians, and Chicanos. The idiomatic phrase "they haven't paid their dues" perhaps captures best this sentiment. The inclusion of non-indigenous newcomers in a program designed to contribute to the redress of specific social and historical

circumstances experienced by people of longer standing in this country is seen as diluting the purpose of the program. Without denying that many Indochinese students face real economic and educational problems as a consequence of sudden departure from their homeland and arrival in an alien culture, serious questions have been raised about the appropriateness of trying to meet these needs through programs whose definition and prescriptions are responses to a specific set of long-term social ills. Criteria for participation in the Minority Students Support Program have evolved in such a way, however, that legal exclusion of Indochinese students is probably not possible. The precedent of interpreting "parolee" status as making Indochinese eligible for most federal and state programs and services indicated to University administrators that Indochinese could not be denied participation, as are foreign students, on the basis of being non-citizens.

The University's decision to consider Indochinese students as minority rather than foreign or majority students had the consequence of allowing them to qualify for special consideration in the allotment of University-administered student aid funds. As Minority Students Support Program participants, for instance, they are usually not expected to generate through self-employment or loans as much of their costs as a typical student. More direct aid is available in the form of either University-funded grants or from federally-funded Supplementary Educational Opportunity Grants. Eighty-seven percent of the refugee students during the academic year 1977-78 were receiving some form of financial assistance administered by the financial aid office. Awards represent a combination of grants, loans, and work-study programs. The average aid package for Indochinese students certified as minority students was $3100, while for

other minority students it was $2841.

Because financial aid awards are determined by an assessment of need, Indochinese students are being socialized to adopt strategies which emphasize their limited financial resources and their ascribed status as minority students. As they become aware of the basis on which amounts of financial aid are determined, they see that it is to their advantage to emphasize low earnings, lack of assets, and financial independence from parents. More than half of the Indochinese applicants for aid claim to be independent from parental resources. This figure reflects the large number of students who are here without parents, but it also includes one quarter of those who have one or both parents in this country.

Indochinese students have compared among themselves the financial aid packages received. Finding differences in amounts, some have argued from a position of equal entitlement based on the common status of being refugees or students. The latter is a perspective stemming from the more elitist higher education system in Vietnam. In fact, students have accused each other of adjusting statements on applications about incomes and independence from parental resources in order to obtain what they believe to be rightfully theirs.

Some Indochinese students are confused by the apparent contradiction between the federal government and sponsors' prescriptions that refugees become self-sufficient through employment and the basis on which financial resources for higher education are distributed. Those Indochinese applicants who are not dependent on parental support and who earned more than $3000 in 1976 (generally in menial labor positions) received

financial aid packages averaging $1200 less than those who similarly claimed independence but had no personal income through employment. In sum, Indochinese students are aware of examples of their fellows who are receiving sizable amounts of aid through stressing the absence of personal resources and their ascribed status as an "ethnic minority."

Vietnamese and American informants have found Indochinese students presently ignorant about the social and historical bases of minority students programs. For most students, identification as Asian-Americans fulfills institutional requirements for gaining access to financial resources, and few have given serious thought to the meaning of minority status or to the relationship they have to other minority students.

Discussion

Ethnic identity is one of many statuses an individual may choose to emphasize, depending on social conditions and relationships to others. Ethnicity is not the same as cultural distinctiveness, although it may take such differences into account. Assertion of ethnic identity is often a purposive act designed to achieve political and economic goals of a people. Joan Vincent has pointed out that ethnicity provides an organizational vessel which "becomes politically relevant when differentiated access to positions of advantage become institutionalized in ethnic terms" (1970:2). The definition of the ethnic identity which is asserted, however, is not completely determined by a people's choice, but is influenced by what categories have meaning in the larger society. For example, the American Indian population is widely diverse in both physical and cultural types. There are vast differences among the Hopi, the Navajo, and the Zuni, all who reside in close proximity in the Southwest. Yet it

is apparent that when they act in concert as "Native Americans" in such groups as AIM or other pan-Indian ethnic groups they have begun to exercise considerably more political clout. Because the category "Native American" resonates in the larger U.S. society, it has together with certain social processes resulted in the emergence of a newfound pan-Indian identity of which the Indians themselves were previously seldom aware (cf. Steele 1975; Thompson and Peterson 1975).

Similarly, segments of peoples who have their origins in Asia have consciously adopted the category "Asian-American" as part of their self-identity. More importantly, this categorization is being imposed on diverse peoples by the dominant society. Certainly Japanese do not recognize a shared cultural system with Southeast Asians. This latter grouping in turn is aware of distinct differences among themselves as separate entities of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, and others. When we compare experiences in the United States, substantial differences are found to exist between second- and third-generation Chinese or Japanese and the recently-arrived refugees.

In testing which strategies of adaptation succeed, it is predictable that Indochinese will discover that certain benefits are derived from adopting approaches which affirm the larger society's categorizations. The outlines have begun to appear of the emergence of an Asian "ethnic" self-identification which until recently did not exist among the Indochinese. This process involves a transition from identifying with one imposed category, "refugee," to another, "Asian-American ethnic minority." That the categories are similar in form, though different in content, means that transition from one to the other is minimally disjunctive. Movement toward identification with the new category will be hastened

if Indochinese perceive some advantage in being aligned with Asian groups trying to exert greater political influence on behalf of constituents by purporting to represent all those classified as Asian-Americans.

For the Indochinese, therefore, the potential exists for the emergence of a new self-identity which includes self-conscious attributes of being Asian and a minority. Since these are categories which resonate in the larger society, conscious adoption of these "badges" of self-identification can be functional in that they mediate the relationship between culturally-distinct people and the institutions of U.S. society. They do this, however, because they are constructs of the larger society. The refugees' own national and cultural identities are in effect simply signifiers of qualification for ascription of these institutionally-meaningful mediating categories of self-identity. The irony of such a twist of fate is that this imposed re-definition of self-identity is being carried out within a context of commitment on the part of the dominant society to a value of respecting ethnic and cultural identity.

The cultural distinctiveness of Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians does not ipso facto make them "minorities." The institutions of the dominant society are defining Asian-Americans as a "minority" category, but this has not been done with regard to some other ethnic categories. People of Irish, Italian, or Greek descent may utilize their ethnic identity as an organizing principle in political and economic action, but they generally seek to achieve their goals in competition with other groups and in confrontation with the political structure. Minority status, on the other hand, is a categorization of the political structure, even though one of its attributes may be the cultural distinctiveness of a people. Vincent

has made the following argument:

> The recognition (often the legal enactment) of the minority group status of others by dominant actors serves to maintain the status quo: the recognition of ethnic group status by other political actors may bring about change. Minority group status is formally encapsulated within political structure; ethnic groups, ephemeral in nature and multipurpose in function, are formed in the interstices of the polity (1974:377).

Each national, cultural, and religious cohort among the Indochinese may wish to interact with U.S. institutions on the basis of self-defined identities; but since institutions are making needed resources available on the basis of institutionally-defined categories, such approaches may not bring about desired responses.

Well-meaning efforts by institutions of higher education to serve the needs of a new segment of the student population by using existing programs have combined with Indochinese definitions of needs and goals to encourage the adoption of an identity as an "ethnic minority." As time passes, Indochinese are likely to recognize that it is their ethnic status which affords access to certain resources. They may also find that in identifying themselves as an ethnic minority they consciously or unconsciously stress the negative attributes of this status. There is the danger in any program designed to meet the needs of a segment of a population that criteria for qualification as part of the targeted category may shape behavior and self-perception of those wishing to be included. This may be especially true when programs developed as responses to one set of social needs are being extended to respond to a dissimilar set of social needs.

For the short term, the refugees' conscious identification as Asian

"ethnics" and a "minority" has strategic value in their adaptation. It is predictable, however, that tensions eventually will arise as segments of the Indochinese population discover that the attributes associated with minority status do not conform to their views of themselves. As indicated, the majority of the refugees have "urban professional" backgrounds, and their expectations and aspirations have been shaped by their pasts. It would not be surprising for some to express the feeling that the classification as "minority" and "Asian" has debased the integrity and value of their own Vietnamese, Laotian, or Cambodian heritages. The pattern of accepting a status imposed by the larger society, but reflecting social characteristics dissimilar from those associated with this status, has already been observed in the relationship between refugees and sponsors.

The Indochinese are not a homogeneous population, but reflect cleavages according to social class, religious affiliation, political beliefs, and occupational backgrounds. Adaptations to U.S. society show a similar diversity, ranging from strict adherence to a personal ethic of financial self-sufficiency to a willingness to rely on outside support. The strategic value of acquiescing to the larger society's definition of their ethnic identity varies according to the adaptation already made. A further cleavage between those who wish to stress their ethnic minority status and those who do not is possible.

The definition of self-identity in ethnic terms is an ongoing process for the Indochinese. We have described some of the major factors involved in this process. These include the refugees' social and occupational backgrounds, the relationship of the refugees with "patrons" and "brokers," the federal government's resettlement policies, and the administrative actions taken by a major state university. The future course of this process

is by no means set. The implications of Indochinese identifying as an ethnic minority are also unclear. As the process continues, however, we feel it is important to understand the asserted or ascribed ethnic identity of the Indochinese as a consequence of interaction between institutions and the refugees and not as a primordial fact.

ENDNOTES

[1]As a remnant of the colonial period, the term "Indochinese" is a category imposed by outsiders and is not respected among people of the three Southeast Asian nations from which refugees have come. However, in absence of a better single category for people from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, we are compelled touse "Indochinese" because of its descriptive utility and currency.

[2]The paper is based on data drawn from a larger study, "A New Minority: Indochinese Refugees in Higher Education," prepared as an institutional report at the University of Minnesota. It is available through ERIC Reproduction Services No. ED 148274. Funds for the study were partially provided by the Center for Educational Development, University of Minnesota.

REFERENCES CITED

Barth, Fredrik

1969 Introduction. In Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. Fredrik Barth, ed. Pp. 9-38. Bergen-Oslo: Universitets Forlaget.

Bruner, Edward M.

1972 Batak Ethnic Associations in Three Indonesian Cities. Southwestern Journal of Anthropology 28:207-229.

Chau Kim Nhan

1975 Refugee Problems in the Days Ahead. In Report of the San Francisco Research Planning Conference on Asian Migration. Pp. 118-123. National Science Foundation.

Cohen, Abner

1969 Custom and Politics in Urban Africa. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Department of Health, State of California

1977 Indochinese Self-Support Project Final Report.

Despres, Leo A., ed.

1975 Ethnicity and Resource Competition in Plural Societies. The Hague: Mouton Publishers.

Foster, Brian L.

1974 Ethnicity and Commerce. American Ethnologist 1:437-448.

Glazer, Nathan, and Daniel Moynihan

1970 Beyond the Melting Pot. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Goldstein, Melvyn C.

1975 Ethnogenesis and Resource Competition Among Tibetan Refugees in South India. In Ethnicity and Resource Competition in Plural Societies. Leo A. Despres, ed. Pp. 159-186. The Hague: Mouton Publishers.

Hamer, John H.

1967 Voluntary Associations as Structures of Change Among the Sidamo of Southwestern Ethiopia. Anthropological Quarterly 40:73-91.

Hendricks, Glenn L.

1974 The Dominican Diaspora. New York: Teachers College Press.

Kelly, Gail Paradise

1977 From Vietnam to America: A Chronicle of the Vietnamese Immigration to the United States. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Le Thi Anh

1975 The Vietnamese Refugees: Perspectives and Recommendations. In Report of the San Francisco Research Planning Conference on Asian

Migration. Pp. 142-154. National Science Foundation.

Little, Kenneth

1957 The Role of Voluntary Associations in West African Urbanization. American Anthropologist 59:579-596.

Liu, William T., and Alice K. Murata

1977 The Vietnamese in America: Refugees or Immigrants? Bridge 5(3):31-39.

Macdonald, John S., and Leatrice D. Macdonald

1964 Chain Migration, Ethnic Neighborhood Formation, and Social Networks. Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly 42:82-97.

Mayer, Phillip

1971 Townsmen or Tribesmen. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Paine, Robert

1971 A Theory of Patronage and Brokerage. In Patrons and Brokers in the East Arctic. Robert Paines, ed. Pp. 8-21. Newfoundland: University of Toronto Press.

Pearlstine, Norman

1975 Exodus '75: Refugees on Guam: Rich, Poor, Average with a Common Fear. The Wall Street Journal 185:1, 20. May 2.

Schemerhorn, R.A.

1974 Ethnicity in the Perspective of the Sociology of Knowledge. Ethnicity 1:1-14.

Sherman, C. Bezalel

1961 The Jew Within American Society: A Study in Ethnic Individuality. Detroit: Wayne State Press.

Smith, M.G.

1969 Some Developments in the Analytic Framework of Pluralism. In Pluralism in Africa. Leo Kuper and M.G. Smith, eds. Pp. 415-458. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Snepp, Frank

1977 Decent Interval. New York: Random House.

Steele, C.H.

1975 Urban Indian Identity in Kansas: Some Implications for Research. In The New Ethnicity: Perspectives from Ethnology. John W. Bennett, ed. Pp. 167-178. St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Co.

Task Force for Indochina Refugees

1977 Report to Congress (June 20). Washington, D.C.: Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Thompson, B., and J. H. Peterson, Jr.

1975 Mississippi Choctaw Identity: Genesis and Change. In The New Ethnicity: Perspectives from Ethnology. John W. Bennett, ed. Pp. 179-196. St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Co.

Vincent, Joan

1970 The Politics of Ethnicity. Paper delivered at the 29th Annual Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology. Boulder, Colorado.

1974 The Structuring of Ethnicity. Human Organization 33:375-379.

Wolf, Eric

1956 Aspects of Group Relations in a Complex Society: Mexico. American Anthropologist 58:1065-1078.